DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 254 104 FL 014 908

AUTHOR Claerr, Thomas A.; Gargan, Richard
TITLE The Role of Songs in the Foreign Language Classroom.
PUB DATE 84
NOTE 6p.; In: Snyder, Barbara, Ed. Look Out World, Here We Come! See FL 014 904.
PUB TYPE Guides - Classroom Use - Guides (For Teachers) (052) -- Journal Articles (080)
JOURNAL CIT OMLTA Journal; p28-32 1984

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Class Activities; *Classroom Techniques; Communication Skills; *Cultural Education; Grammar; Language Skills; Language Variation; Listening Comprehension; Literary Criticism; *Music; *Second Language Instruction; Singing; *Spanish; Student Attitudes

ABSTRACT

With some imagination, songs can be used to teach all aspects of foreign language. The language teacher can take advantage of the cultural content of songs by playing holiday music during the appropriate season; explaining the traditions and history of songs; discussing songs with cultural flavor; presenting a variety of music types; and discussing instruments, harmony, and composition. For use in teaching listening comprehension, songs can be viewed as a type of exaggerated speech, and exercises can be developed for listening practice, including having students fill in the blanks of the text as they listen, write down all words they recognize as they listen, and reconstruct the theme. Activities for highlighting the linguistic aspects of song include using a song that reinforces recently learned grammatical structures or vocabulary; using a song with regionalisms, dialect, or slang; and comparing English and target language translations. Songs have potential for literary analysis, including analysis of rhyme, vocabulary, meter, and constructions; investigation of a particular author or composer; comparison with formal literature; and analysis of literary devices. Communicative activities involving songs include creating a survey based on a song's theme, student descriptions of the action in a song, and discussion of the author's intent or feelings. Finally, a substantial benefit of using songs is that they provide variety in the class routine and are enjoyable and relaxing. (MSE)

**********
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
**********

ED254104

OMLTA Journal 1984

# THE ROLE OF SONGS IN THE FOREIGN LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

Thomas A. Claerr and Richard Gargan
The Ohio State University

Language learning is a difficult and often tedious task, and throughout the history of foreign language education, teachers have turned to a variety of devices to make the process more successful and enjoyable. One of the more enduring recourses has been the use of songs. They are fun, they can motivate; they are real-life examples of the language, literature, and culture of the people who composed and sing them. In addition, they are a natural bridge between the interests of the student and the target language. In recent years imaginative and innovative educators have discovered a wealth of practical applications for the use of songs in the classroom. This discussion will explore some of these and offer ideas for implementation in the foreign language classroom. Specific examples are given for the Spanish classroom, but similar materials are available for other languages, and the activities suggested are easily adapted.

## Culture

The image of a society is reflected in its songs. They treat social issues and controversial topics; they speak of historical events as well as daily concerns and emotions. Every culture has songs which celebrate national and religious feasts and holidays. Songs are a valuable resource for analyzing the causes and effects of social change (1). Songs illustrate the target culture in a real-life setting. The language teacher can take advantage of the cultural content of songs by doing some of the following:

1 Play holiday music at appropriate seasons; e.g. villancicos at Christmas.

2 Explain the traditions and history of songs like "Guantanamera" and "La Cucaracha."

3 Discuss songs with cultural flavor: machismo, for example, or amor no correspondido.

4 Present a variety of types of music: la salsa, el son, la música ranchera, mariachi, classical guitar. Tie in with historical background, and relation to art and literature.

5 Discuss types of instruments, and characteristics such as harmony and composition.

## Listening Comprehension

Songs can be viewed as a type of exaggerated speech at one end of a continuum: normal speech, heightened speech (as in

FL014908

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

OMLTA

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

sermons), dramatic speech, chant or auctioneering, and, finally, song. Although songs differ from normal speech in the amount of distortion, they are similar linguistically, and represent valid materials for study within the framework of language learning (2). Songs have unique advantages for the practice of listening comprehension because of their meaningful context, an appealing "package," and topics of broad human interest. In addition they provide wide variation in speed of delivery, and more significant phrasing and linking (3). Songs also have available the cues of rhyme, rhythm, and repetition. Following are some approaches for listening comprehension practice:

1 Hand out the text with blanks and ask students to fill in the blanks as they listen.

2 Translate in pauses or use mouthing and gestures for additional cueing.

3 Ask students to listen to a song without the text and to jot down all the words they recognize.

4 Reconstruct the theme of the song as a whole-class activity.

5 List and review unfamiliar vocabulary in the order in which it appears in the song, and then ask students to listen to the song.

Linguistic aspects

There are many potential benefits for learning to be gained from carefully planned use of songs: some examples are the introduction and reinforcement of grammatical structures, vocabulary, and idiomatic expressions, or the exposure to various types of language such as dialects, speed of delivery, register, etc. Songs offer an opportunity for repetitious drill without the monotony of pattern drills. Repetition is made pleasant by factors of rhythm, melody, and emotional interest (4). In addition, since songs of a given culture naturally follow the basic rhythm, intonation, pitch, and other dynamics of its language, songs aid in the acquisition of the less tangible aspects of language such as phrasing, linking, intonation, stress, and pronunciation (5). Music therapists have noted that most students are able to correctly pronounce phonemes while singing; songs have proven beneficial in learning pronunciation for timid students and even for those with speech impediments (6). A few suggestions for implementation are:

1 Leave blanks in the text that stress recent vocabulary or grammar. Ask students to fill in the blanks.

2 Use a song that illustrates recently learned grammar or vocabulary. Before students sing the song, go over the text, making

sure the students understand. Check comprehension by asking students to elaborate or by asking questions in the target language. This is an excellent opportunity for painless review and reinforcement in a meaningful setting.

3 Use a song with regionalisms, dialect, or slang to illustrate the variety of spoken language. Students hear "real" Spanish not often found in books.

4 Compare translations of the same song in Spanish and English, e.g., "Somos Novios"/"It's Impossible," or "Guantanamera."

Literary Analysis

A surprising variety of genres have been set to music: monologs and dialogs, ballads, opera, short stories, comedies, social commentary, oral and written history, games, poems. Songs provide a relatively painless method of introducing students to literature. The interesting format and appealing package overcome objections to studying literature. Additionally, the texts of songs are usually simplified, compact, and repetitious which make them appropriate at this introductory level (7). The following are possible approaches:

1 Analyze rhyme, register, vocabulary, meter, and the grammatical constructions used.

2 Investigate the author or composer, and his or her life and work.

3 Compare to formal literary genre.

4 Search out literary devices: alliteration, hyperbole, onomatopoeia, etc.

Communicative Activities

Since songs often express intense emotion and strong personal feelings, they are a natural stimulus and jumping-off point for in-class discussion, both oral and written (8). Many songs have an interesting storyline that can serve as the material for a question and answer period. The following are some other suggested activities:

1 Make a survey, interview, or questionnaire based on the theme or issues in the song.

2 Play music. Student describes what he or she imagines is happening.

3 Discuss the thoughts, feelings and experiences of the author that prompted writing of the song.

## Affective Domain

Perhaps the most obvious benefit of the use of songs in the classroom is that they are fun. Most human beings like music and have a positive response to it. Yet the area of affective benefits of the use of songs is probably the most taken-for-granted and, at the same time, the least understood aspect of the use of songs. There is no denying that songs are enjoyable, but the benefits are both broader and deeper than that.

An obvious but perhaps underappreciated value in the use of songs is the variety that it adds to the classroom routine. "Research on teaching reveals that variety appears (along with clarity and enthusiasm) as important for maintaining student interest and attention, and ultimately for producing higher achievement" (9). The potential for motivation of otherwise disinterested students is one of the strongest recommendations for including songs in the curriculum. The use of songs creates a relaxed, informal atmosphere and provides a high interest, non-threatening atmosphere for learning (10).

Some of the benefits of learning with song fall in the area of brain functions. Lozanov has shown that music reduces anxiety and inhibitions and their limitations on mental abilities (11). The theory of suggestive learning hypothesizes that the best learning occurs in a state of reduced conscious awareness or indirect attention, as occurs while listening to music (12). Also, the intonation, rhyme, and rhythm of songs aids in memorization of material (13). In addition, it is well known that the close placement of a pleasing stimulus (music) to a second stimulus (language) will result in some transfer of desire to the second stimulus (14). Popular songs have the added advantage of relating to a very important area in most students' lives. By focusing on an area with which they are familiar, students are able to relate better to the materials and thus to learn more quickly and easily (15).

## Conclusion

With a bit of imagination, songs can be used to teach virtually all aspects of language learning: the four skills, literature and culture, and affective values.

> The pedagogical potential of music in foreign languages is enormous and has only begun to be realized. As more experimentation takes place and better materials become available, music in all its forms, from opera to popular ballad, will proabably become an integral part of any sophisticated foreign language instruction program (16).

Thus we have seen that the role of songs in the foreign language classroom is a varied one. It certainly is not a panacea, yet evidence indicates that the use of songs ought to be an important part in the strategy for foreign language teaching and learning.

Notes

1 B. L. Cooper, "Popular Music: A Creative Teaching Resource," Audiovisual Instruction, 24 (March 1979), 37-43.
2 Yukiko Jolly, "The Use of Songs in Teaching Foreign Languages," Modern Language Journal, 59 (1975), 11-14.
3 Donald H. Schuster, ed., The Journal of Suggestive-Accelerative Learning and Teaching, 3, 2 (1978), ERIC: ED 181 722.
4 Marisa Gatti-Taylor, "Songs as a Linguistic and Cultural Resource in the Intermediate Italian Class," Foreign Language Annals, 13 (1980), 465-469.
5 Alice C. Pack, "TESL and Music," TESL Reporter, 2, 3 (Spring 1969), 1-3.
6 Gatti-Taylor, op cit., 466.
7 Ibid.
8 B. J. Baddock, "Creative Language Use in Communication Activities," English Language Teaching Journal, 35, 3 (April 1981), 230.
9 Gertrude Moskowitz, Caring and Sharing in the Foreign Language Class, Rowley, MA: Newbury House, 1978, 355.
10 William D. Leith, "Advanced French Conversation Through Popular Music," French Review, 52, 4 (March 1979), 537-551.
11 W. Jane Bancroft, Suggestopedia and Soviet Sleep-Learning, (1981), ERIC: ED 206 161.
12 Schuster, op cit., 84.
13 Jayne Halsne Abrate, "Pedagogical Applications of the French Popular Song in the Foreign Language Classroom," Modern Language Journal, 67 (1983), 8-12.
14 Michael McKenna, "Songs for Language Study," Audiovisual Instruction, 22 (1977), 42.
15 Moskowitz, op. cit., 355.
16 Leith, op. cit., 351.